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AUTHOR(S):

佐々木, 崇

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The problem of analyticity in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”

Takashi SASAKI

In “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (“TD”) Quine denied two central doctrines of logical positivism, the analytic / synthetic distinction and reductionism. He then proposed an alternative scheme for the philosophy of knowledge and language, that is holistic empiricism. “TD” can be divided into two parts. The first part deny analytic / synthetic distinction by pointing out failures of proposed definition of analyticity, and the second part deny the reductionism in terms of holism.

“TD” evoked many important criticisms. For example, Grice and Strawson (G&S) criticized Quine’s argument against the analytic / synthetic distinction in “In Defence of a Dogma”, and in some articles Putnam pointed out Quine’s conceptual confusion between analytic and a priori, and defended analytic / synthetic distinction in his own ways. Both criticisms are different in the attitude towards Quine’s argument, but they agree on the point of denial of Quine’s argument in the first part of “TD”. The important issue concerning the evaluation of “TD” is the assessment of argument in the first part of “TD” and singling out problems to be investigated.

In this paper, I try to reconsider the adequacy and significance of argument in the first part of “TD”. Firstly, I summarize the argument in “TD”. Secondly, I examine G&S’s criticism, evaluate the significant points of G&S’s criticism, and point out problems in “TD”. Thirdly, I consider some problems through examination of Putnam’s criticism, and then finally I try to consider further problems. As a result of these considerations, I think that the argument in the first part of “TD” made some points clear, especially the disagreement concerning what meaning is, and also the need to reconsider the relationship between epistemology and language, the epistemological and semantic status of logical truth. Taking these problems into account, I think, the argument in the first part of “TD” still has very important significance in philosophical investigation.